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## *Developments in Indochina*

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## *Developments in Indochina*

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VIETNAM

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The Communists have been improving and expanding their road network through this region.

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North Vietnamese supply shipments across the DMZ and in northern South Vietnam have declined sharply since mid-September, largely because of heavy rains. During August and early September the North Vietnamese shipped roughly 1,000 tons per day through the area. These shipments began to fall off in mid-September, and since 1 October only a little over 100 tons of cargo have moved south. In addition to interfering with vehicle traffic, the rains flooded many storage areas, knocked out bridges, and disrupted communications. The rainy season has also curtailed cargo shipments through the Laos Panhandle since the beginning of the summer.

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[REDACTED]

The Communists have already built a large supply base in South Vietnam and adjacent areas, and it is thought they have substantial stockpiles of military equipment and munitions on hand there. Some shortage of foodstuffs, especially rice, exists in some parts of South Vietnam, however, and the Communists will be using the next few weeks to alleviate these shortages and to augment ordnance stocks. [REDACTED]

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Quang Duc--Hollow Communist Gains? [REDACTED]

Ground fighting in the Quang Duc area is now moderate, but it will probably increase over the next few days as both sides reinforce their combat units. The South Vietnamese are conducting heavy air and artillery strikes in an effort to keep Communist units off balance. They are also bringing in armored units, apparently to launch a major drive to reopen Route 14 and retake the three outposts lost last week. For their part, the Communists appear to be moving in another regiment, and there is some concern on the South Vietnamese side that they may be preparing to launch additional attacks against other remote towns in the province and to the south in Phuoc Long.

While the three captured camps in themselves have relatively little strategic importance, their loss dealt government forces a psychological blow and has exposed other towns in the area to the danger of Communist attack. Particularly since the attacks came on the heels of the fall of a similar outpost in Pleiku Province, government commanders will be pressed by Saigon to regain the initiative.

Possibly the most significant feature of the attacks is the Communist use of armored units to support infantry assaults. The relative ease with which they

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[ ]

captured the towns suggests that there is an improvement over their poor performance during the Easter offensive last year. In addition, the attacks served notice on Saigon that the Communists will not sit idly by while government artillery and ground probes are launched against Communist-held territory.

Whatever the outcome of the fighting in Quang Duc, this sort of eye-for-an-eye action is likely to continue. Some South Vietnamese commanders are claiming that the loss of the outposts is only temporary and that they will soon retake them. At the same time, they have come up with a rationalization to explain any failure on their part. Because the recent fighting has not involved the government's better units and is being conducted in a remote area away from major population centers, they assert that the Communist gains are not very significant.

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Thuan Orders More Aggressive Action

[ ]

General Thuan, the new commander for the area surrounding Saigon, has ordered South Vietnamese infantry and air units to take more aggressive action against the Communists. He told President Thieu on 8 November that he expects the Communists to launch a major offensive after the rice harvest--some time before the end of the year--aimed at Saigon and that he intends to try to seize the initiative from the Communists, apparently with Thieu's blessing.

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[ ] Thuan informed his subordinates on 9 November that he had ordered:

- refitting and strengthening of all government main and territorial forces in the region;
- surprise ground attacks against Communist positions;
- maximum use of air and artillery strikes, especially against Communist rear service areas;

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- an increase in fighter aircraft on strip alert and a larger number of observation aircraft over enemy-held areas;
- removal of all restrictions on bombing or shelling Communist-held areas;
- construction of tank barricades in high-threat areas and a general improvement of armored tactics.

There are as yet no reliable indications that the Communists are readying a major attack against Saigon. There has been increased fighting in the region during the past few weeks, precipitated by the "war" over the current rice harvest and by the efforts of each side to improve its tactical position. These clashes are likely to continue and may occasionally become fairly extensive. If Thuan does move as forcefully as he is suggesting, he is likely to stimulate an equally strong Communist response.

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Improving Government Performance

President Thieu is continuing to shuffle personnel at the top levels of his regime, and there are indications that some organizational changes are in prospect. Most of the changes announced thus far appear aimed mainly at improving the efficiency of the government.

Following the shifts in the military high command over the last few weeks and several changes in Saigon's economic ministries, Thieu last week announced the appointment of new ministers of foreign affairs and health. Vuong Van Bac, an able diplomat who has served on Saigon's peace talks delegation and as ambassador to London, has replaced acting foreign minister Nguyen Phu Duc, who will become ambassador to Belgium. South Vietnam has been giving increased attention in recent months to countering Vietnamese Communist initiatives in the international arena, and Bac's experience could be an asset.

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Tran Minh Tung has been reappointed public health minister. Tung left the post last summer and ran successfully for the Senate. His Senate seat will be vacant now that he is returning to the cabinet. Tung is a titular leader of Thieu's Democracy Party, but he is not a major power.

Thieu is said to be considering setting up a new security ministry, consisting of the National Police, the Central Intelligence Organization, the Military Security Service, and elements of the Joint General Staff. If created, the ministry could lead to better coordination of security functions and eliminate overlapping assignments.

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The Mini-Navy

Aerial photography [ ] confirms that North Vietnam has at least three KOMAR missile patrol boats. The photography shows the three boats at a naval base northeast of Haiphong.

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Hanoi received four KOMARs from the Soviet Union late last year. On 19 December, US pilots claimed to have sunk one and damaged two. There is no evidence that Hanoi has received additional KOMARs, and it is likely that the three KOMARs spotted are the ones Hanoi received last winter.

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LAOS

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Le Duan Visits

Le Duan's visit to Laos from 2-6 November was probably intended at least in part to put Hanoi's stamp of approval on the Lao peace accord. The visit, the first ever made by such a high-level North Vietnamese delegation to Communist-controlled territory in Laos, evoked warm and mutually complimentary speeches by both sides with no evidence of any disagreement.

The chief of the Pathet Lao delegation in Vientiane, Phoun Sipraseuth, claimed to US officials on 8 November that Le Duan went to Sam Neua to brief the Lao Communist central committee on recent North Vietnamese conversations with Soviet and Chinese leaders. This seems unlikely, however, because that sort of exchange could easily be made through Pathet Lao representatives in Hanoi. A more plausible explanation is that Le Duan went to lend the prestige of North Vietnam's most prominent leader to the peace accord. Phoun Sipraseuth commented to US officials that Hanoi had not voiced any opposition to the Lao settlement and that the Pathet Lao remained committed to the early formation of the coalition government.

The joint communique issued following the conclusion of the visit was especially flowery, describing Lao Communist - North Vietnamese relations as a "model relationship rarely seen so far"--perhaps a veiled reference to Hanoi's apparent troubles with the Khmer Communists. The extremely favorable references to the Vietnam and Lao peace agreements may have been intended as a "try it, you'll like it" suggestion to the Khmer.

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CAMBODIA

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The RGNJ Goes South

Sihanouk's fragile relations with the Khmer Communists took an important turn on 9 November when the Prince announced that--with the exception of the Foreign Ministry--all of the portfolios of his Peking-based "Royal Government of National Union" would be transferred to insurgent cadre within Cambodia. The former Cambodian leader also indicated that his in-country "defense minister," Khieu Samphan, would serve as "acting prime minister" until such time as the ailing "prime minister" Penn Nouth is able to go to Cambodia. All that apparently will remain of Sihanouk's Peking operation will be a small "mission," evidently to be headed by the Prince, which will receive foreign dignitaries and diplomats.

Last month Sihanouk first surfaced the idea of moving his "ministries" to Cambodia, stating that it would help remove the stigma of exile from his "government." At the time, he indicated that the initiative had come from him, not from the Khmer Communists, and that it had been accompanied by his offer to step aside in favor of a Khmer Communist leader. Sihanouk apparently has out-maneuvered the Communists, however, because he is remaining as "chief of state." Whether winning the bluff also means that Sihanouk has gained ground with the Khmer Communists on the question of negotiations is far from certain.

On the same day that Sihanouk made his announcement, Ieng Sary, the Khmer Communists' "special envoy" who has been Sihanouk's watchdog in Peking for the past two years, left the Chinese capital for Cambodia via Hanoi. Although Sihanouk and Sary managed to maintain "correct" relations, there was considerable

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ill-will between them. Sihanouk's failure to attend any of the farewell functions for Sary in Peking was one sign of the tension between the Prince and the Khmer Communists.

The political distance between Sihanouk and the Communists was increased on 12 November when Sihanouk announced that he had canceled plans to visit the "liberated zone" of Cambodia in 1974 and would not go ahead with scheduled foreign trips. In making his announcement, Sihanouk reportedly emphasized that since he was "a head of state who does not govern," his presence was not needed within Cambodia. Earlier this year, Sihanouk had mentioned plans for a return visit to Cambodia, but there has been no mention of such a trip in recent statements. For the time being, he evidently will stay in Canton with his mother, Queen Kossamak, who is in poor health.

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Changes in Command

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Recent tactical reverses and deficiencies in the handling of new recruits have led to a rare reshuffling of Cambodian Army staff posts and regional commands. A key change is the appointment of former assistant chief of staff for operations (J-3) General Hou Hang Sin to head the directorate of training. General Sin was an inefficient and unpopular J-3, but he is an unusually energetic officer who could probably do much to revitalize the training directorate. At present, however, he is sulking over Lon Nol's refusal to let him stay on as J-3, which he apparently regarded as a better steppingstone to the post of chief of staff.

Taking over as the new J-3 is the former deputy chief of staff for logistics (J-4), General Mao Khem Sum, another uncommonly forceful individual. He is a trained line officer who reportedly is also good at staff work, but, like General Sin, he is unhappy

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about leaving his previous post. General Sum is regarded as one of the army's more corrupt officers, and his disgruntlement may stem from concern that his new assignment will afford fewer opportunities for profiteering.

25X6      The most surprising of the new postings is the assignment of General Ith Syath to the J-4 position. The capable former deputy in the logistics branch was a last-minute choice over the original nominee for the job, [ ] General Moul Khleung. Moul Khleung was given the hollow job of "adviser" to Lon Nol. The staff changes were rounded out by the transfer of Military Academy Commandant General Kim An-dore to the post of assistant chief of staff for personnel (J-1). According to the US Embassy, An-dore can be expected to try to improve discipline and to introduce more honesty into the personnel branch.

Even though none of the new regional commanders is among the army's top officers, in general the moves seem to be an improvement. The new commander of the important subdivision of Kompong Chhnang, General Chea Kim Eng, appears to have more ability than his predecessor to organize effective defenses along Route 5. In two other key subdivisions--Kandal, on Phnom Penh's southern front, and Kompong Speu, encompassing the Route 4 front--capable field grade officers are also taking over.

Cambodian Army commander in chief General Fernandez is pleased with the new appointments and is claiming credit for selling them to Lon Nol. As always, however, the ultimate effectiveness of those officers will depend not on their enthusiasm or competence but on just how much actual authority they will be given by the President, who still calls most of the important military shots. The only noteworthy civilian reaction thus far to the changes has come from High Political Council member Sirik Matak.

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While he has indicated that he approves of the shifts, he has gone out of his way to disassociate himself personally from them. Matak has also predictably seized on the displeasure of Generals Sin, Sum, and Khlong as a sign that Lon Nol is losing the backing of some of his loyal supporters in the army.

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INTERNATIONAL

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Moderation from Peking

By muting its support for the Khmer Communist military effort in recent public statements, Peking has made clear that it prefers a political to a military solution in Cambodia.

Authoritative comment on Cambodia's National Day last week was weaker and less explicit about Chinese backing than statements on the same occasion in 1972. An editorial in *People's Daily* in 1972 pledged "firm support" for the war effort; no such formulation appeared in this year's editorial. A message from Chou En-lai to Sihanouk in 1972 said the Chinese people would provide "all-out support and assistance" to the insurgents; Chou's message this year was vague and less encompassing.

Chinese propaganda has tended to substantiate Sihanouk's recurring claim that Peking is reluctant to ship military supplies to his forces in Cambodia. In replaying a recent insurgent broadcast, NCNA deleted virtually all references to Communist military success and complaints about American military deliveries to Phnom Penh. Instead, Peking focused almost exclusively on insurgent claims that Communist forces rely heavily on captured Cambodian Army weapons as "their main source of equipment." Another NCNA replay dropped a Khmer Communist characterization of China as the insurgents' "reliable rear guard."

The Chinese also have edited insurgent statements regarding an offensive in a way that clearly shows Peking's lack of enthusiasm and optimism. Peking has deleted from versions replayed in the Chinese press claims that the offensive will be "decisive" leading to "total victory" and has played down claims that the insurgent position is superior and that the Phnom Penh government is about to collapse.

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